

IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1, 3, and 6 as indicated below. Also, please amend claims 2,4,5, and 7 as set forth below.

1. (Cancelled)

2. (Currently Amended) [The method as in claim 1,] A method for forming a meltblown web, comprising:

forming fibers by extruding a molten thermoplastic material through a plurality of channels in a die as molten filaments;

attenuating the molten filaments with a high velocity fluid stream to reduce the diameter of the filaments;

depositing the attenuated filaments on a collecting surface to form a web of randomly dispersed meltblown fibers;

heating at least a tip apex portion of the die defining outlets at the ends of the channels through which the thermoplastic material is extruded with a heating element disposed relative to the tip apex portion; and

maintaining the tip portion at a temperature sufficient to keep the thermoplastic material in a desired molten state primarily with the heating element so that the attenuating air may be maintained at a temperature below the melting point of the thermoplastic material; and

further comprising heating the die tip apex portion with an infrared lamp.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended) [The method as in claim 1,] A method for forming a meltblown web, comprising:

forming fibers by extruding a molten thermoplastic material through a plurality of channels in a die as molten filaments;

attenuating the molten filaments with a high velocity fluid stream to reduce the diameter of the filaments;

depositing the attenuated filaments on a collecting surface to form a web of randomly dispersed meltblown fibers;

heating at least a tip apex portion of the die defining outlets at the ends of the channels through which the thermoplastic material is extruded with a heating element disposed relative to the tip apex portion; and

maintaining the tip portion at a temperature sufficient to keep the thermoplastic material in a desired molten state primarily with the heating element so that the attenuating air may be maintained at a temperature below the melting point of the thermoplastic material; and further comprising heating the die tip apex portion with electrical current directed through the die.

5. (Currently Amended) [The method as in claim 1,] A method for forming a meltblown web, comprising:

forming fibers by extruding a molten thermoplastic material through a plurality of channels in a die as molten filaments;

attenuating the molten filaments with a high velocity fluid stream to reduce the diameter of the filaments;

depositing the attenuated filaments on a collecting surface to form a web of randomly dispersed meltblown fibers;

heating at least a tip apex portion of the die defining outlets at the ends of the channels through which the thermoplastic material is extruded with a heating element disposed relative to the tip apex portion; and

maintaining the tip portion at a temperature sufficient to keep the thermoplastic material in a desired molten state primarily with the heating element so that the attenuating air may be maintained at a temperature below the melting point of the thermoplastic material; and

further comprising heating the die tip apex portion with a heated fluid conducted through at least one passageway defined through the die.

6. (Cancelled)

7. (Currently Amended) [The method as in claim 1,] A method for forming a meltblown web, comprising:

forming fibers by extruding a molten thermoplastic material through a plurality of channels in a die as molten filaments;

attenuating the molten filaments with a high velocity fluid stream to reduce the diameter of the filaments;

depositing the attenuated filaments on a collecting surface to form a web of randomly dispersed meltblown fibers;

heating at least a tip apex portion of the die defining outlets at the ends of the channels through which the thermoplastic material is extruded with a heating element disposed relative to the tip apex portion; and

maintaining the tip portion at a temperature sufficient to keep the thermoplastic material in a desired molten state primarily with the heating element so that the

attenuating air may be maintained at a temperature below the melting point of the thermoplastic material; and

further comprising heating the die tip apex portion indirectly with a heating element disposed adjacent to and spaced from the die tip apex portion.